



WEST BLETCHLEY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2017

Introduction

I am delighted to introduce this year's annual report which summarises West Bletchley Council's main activities and achievements during 2016/17 and details our statement of accounts at the close of the financial year.

During the past year we have continued to seek to protect and enhance those local assets and services that you have told us are important to the local community. This includes working with Milton Keynes Council to secure the transfer of ownership of key areas of open space and all of the parish's play areas. We have also set aside resources to help fund the refurbishment of Bletchley Library and support the continued provision of local library services.

We have continued to work on your behalf in representing your views on local matters of concern. We have, in this respect, objected to planning applications for development on land adjacent to the parish which includes our ongoing challenge to the proposals for development on the site formerly referred to as Salden Chase.

We remain committed to developing the ways in which we communicate with residents. We believe, from your feedback that we have achieved improvements, as you have told us that the level of information that we provide has improved over the last year. You have, however, told us that problems with littering and dog fouling are getting worse. We are, in response to this, considering what new actions we can take to address this.

Councillor Veronica Belcher
Chair of West Bletchley Council

Summary of Activities and Achievements

West Bletchley Council has reviewed its overall performance against our agreed Business Plan 2016/19 and updated the targets and actions required for 2017/19 in the light of this.

The Council regularly consults with parish residents either formally by survey or informally, whether at events or when residents visit the Council offices, in order to determine priorities and/or concerns that the Council should address. The Business Plan 2016/19 was compiled with the benefit of this regular engagement and we have continued to review performance through these means as well as through postal surveys with a random sample of residents.

Residents' surveys completed during the last twelve months, continue to show good satisfaction levels. Of those who responded to 2016 postal surveys:

- 91% indicated that the way in which the Council communicated with residents had improved or stayed the same over the last 12 months
- 90% indicated that the way in which the Council represented them had either got better or stayed the same.
- 80%, indicated that standards of landscape maintenance had either got better or stayed the same.
- 94% agreed that West Bletchley Council should ensure that Landscape Maintenance continues to be provided.

Residents also rated Public Realm services as very important and indicated that they are concerned about the future delivery of these services

Feedback from our residents is an essential way of ensuring that the Council's priorities are in line with the views of our residents and that our policies and the actions we take continue to have a positive effect on the lives of those who live within the parish.

In May 2016 the Council completed an extension to the Frank Moran Centre in Melrose Avenue, creating space for the activities previously undertaken in the Melrose Avenue Resource Centre (The MARC) and thus combining the full range of community services in the one building.

Using findings from the consultation undertaken during 2015, the Council engaged a landscape architect to develop plans to ensure best use of the available space at Rickley Park; the resulting design plan has been shared widely. Work is currently in progress to seek planning approval for the proposed plans from Milton Keynes Council, to establish a build programme with detailed costings and then to identify appropriate contractors for each stage of the plans. The Council is keen to improve the range of facilities available to enable more West Bletchley residents of all ages to enjoy the park. It is expected that improvement works will commence in late 2017.

In the Community

- The extended Frank Moran Centre now provides a single hub for a wide variety of support services and activities to be available for use by all members of our community. As well as being a drop in venue for local residents of all ages to meet up and socialise, including easy access to computers and information, the centre also facilitates regular meetings of age or interest related social groups in the main hall. Groups include the lively Franks 55+ group that meets twice weekly, Arts and Crafts, belly dancing, a Junior Youth Club provided by MKC and a weekly lunch club run by Age UK MK. It also provides discreet access to support and advice from agencies including Money Lifeline, Food Bank, Age UK MK and Job Club.
- The Council continues to support projects which aim to address social isolation, whether of individuals or groups. Living in the Moment sessions run twice monthly, and Carers MK now provide a monthly Carers Support Group, both at the Council offices in Whaddon Way. The Men in Sheds project, based in Rickley Park, has become well established, meeting

several times a week and providing a range of activities and crafts, with an emphasis on woodworking, to a core group of local older male residents.

- The annual West Bletchley carnival, managed and supported by the Council, remains the high profile event within the parish attracting all ages to both participate and watch.
- A range of smaller scale events and activities are being developed across the calendar. This year a series of 'West Bletchley Hops' proved popular with our residents. In conjunction with Milton Keynes Play Association, we ran play and activity sessions for children during school holiday periods at local parks and community centres, which will continue during the coming year.
- The Council's partnership with West Bletchley Wellbeing and Counselling service continues to provide a valuable resource for our residents, enabling them to access timely and free counselling support, when it is needed.
- The Council continues to fund the scheme at Bletchley Leisure Centre, which enables many West Bletchley residents, within those qualifying categories and age groups, to swim for free.
- The Council's quarterly magazine, Open Door, delivered free to every household in the parish, provides information and updates on the wide range of activities on offer.
- The Council sets aside an annual budget which is used as grant funding for local groups who need support for specific projects or purchases.

Environment

- Feedback from residents confirms that landscape maintenance is a high priority and an appreciation that standards have improved since we took responsibility for maintenance of all areas of open space in June 2014. The Council continues to work closely with its appointed contractor to ensure sustainability of parks and other areas of public open space.
- For the third year running the prestigious Green Flag status has been awarded to Chepstow Park.

- The Council monitors the condition of potholes on highways and pathways and have been expeditiously repaired by Milton Keynes Council, despite an apparent tightening of budgets.
- In response to growing concerns the Council has agreed to develop a new strategy to address parking issues within the parish. This includes allocating a sum from its capital fund to facilitate new parking projects.
- West Bletchley Council remains one of few parish councils across Milton Keynes to provide free dog waste bags to residents and there are more dog waste bins per square metre than any other parish within the borough.
- However, feedback from residents is that litter and dog fouling are getting worse and continue to be a cause of concern. The Council will be continuing with its education and awareness programme, particularly in view of impact of recent changes to Milton Keynes Council's street cleaning programme.

Planning

- The Council has continued to progress the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for West Bletchley and has recently completed an extensive consultation on its Draft Plan. The comments received from statutory consultees, local residents, landowners and other stakeholders will now be reviewed and appropriate amendments will be made to the plan prior to its submission for formal consultation and examination.
- West Bletchley Council's planning committee comments on all planning applications submitted to Milton Keynes Council that relate to land or property situated within West Bletchley, taking account of this Council's planning policy as well as the views expressed by local residents.

- The prospect of large scale housing development on land within Aylesbury Vale, but adjacent to the parish boundary, remains. The Council remains alert to any proposals from developers, keeping residents informed and supporting their objections to planning approval.

Council Finance

The following figures have been extracted from the draft accounts for the Council, for the year ended 31st March 2017, subject to audit.

DRAFT SUBJECT TO AUDIT

Local Councils in England

Annual return for the year ended 31 March 2017

WEST BLETCHLEY COUNCIL

The statement of accounts

	Year ending	
	31 March 2016 £	31 March 2017 £
1 Balances brought Forward	1,524,737	1,631,570
2 (+) Annual Precept	803,584	821,017
3 (+) Total other Receipts	296,255	313,673
4 (-) Staff costs	366,293	364,409
5 (-) Loan interest/ capital repayments	35,009	34,377
6 (-) Total other payments	591,704	540,718
7 (=) Balances carried forward	1,631,570	1,826,755
8 Total cash & investments	1,597,934	1,809,877
9 Total fixed assets and long term assets	915,464	1,057,228
10 Total borrowings	303,448	275,862